بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

WHY SHOULD MUSLIMS VISIT AL-MASJID AL-AQSA?



Dr Wasfi Kailani

MABDA
English Monograph Series — Book No. 17

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

سبحان الذي أسرى بعبده ليلا من المسجد الحرام
إلى المسجد الأقصى الذي باركنا حوله لنريه من آياتنا
إنه هو السميع البصير

Glory be to Him Who carried His servant by night from Al-Masjid Al-Haram to Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa; the environs of which We have blessed, that We might show him some of Our signs. Indeed He is the Hearing, the Seeing.

Qur'an,
Al-Isra', 17:1

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Precis

This paper sheds light on some of the practical, political and religious reasons why all Muslims, and not only Palestinian Muslims, should rally around Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa. Muslims should visit Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa in order to empower the steadfast and stalwart Jerusalemites who struggle to remain in the Holy City; so that they may know that responsibility for the mosque does not rest with them alone, but with the world's 1.7 billion Muslims.

Jerusalemites, the 1948 Arabs and the Jerusalem Awqaf Administration cannot confront the campaign to Judaize the Holy City on their own.

There are over 20 tunnels and excavations that threaten to penetrate the walls of Al-Haram Al-Sharif. Some have been converted into synagogues with Talmudic names that imply to the visitor that they are part of the so-called Jewish temple.

Since the year 2000, over 50,000 settlers and 2 million non-Muslim tourists have entered Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa without the Awqaf's permission.

Since 1967, more than 14,000 Palestinians have been driven out of Jerusalem and over 3,300 homes have been razed. The Separation Wall has removed over 70,000 homes from the perimeters of the Holy City of Jerusalem.

The daily Jewish presence and prayer in Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa is the first step in the plan to divide Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa between Muslims and Jews; exactly as has been done in Hebron in the Ibrahimi Mosque (referred to by Israelis as Cave of the Patriarchs).

Since 1967, most visitors to Jerusalem are non-Muslims who only to listen to the Jewish narrative regarding Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa.

How do we interpret the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) visiting both Jerusalem (Al-Israa' wal Miraj) and Mecca (Treaty of

Hudaybiyah) before both cities witnessed Muslim conquests?

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

> *Whosoever wants to behold a piece of Paradise, let him behold Bayt Al-Maqdis.*

The Prophet (PBUH) also said:

> *Whosoever performs Ihram for Hajj or Umrah from Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa and then proceeds to Al-Masjid Al-Haram, their past and future sins will be forgiven, or they will be entered into Paradise.*

Visiting Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa never stopped, even when Jerusalem was under the Crusaders. No scholars, including ibn Taymiyyah and Al-Ghazali, ever described these visits as 'normalization' with, or surrender to, Crusader rule.

Warding off harm: Those who forbid visiting Jerusalem base it on the jurisprudential principle that "warding off harm takes precedence over causing benefit". They claim that the harm in this instance is that visiting Jerusalem is normalization with the occupation authority. Normalization is a political term that means "to establish 'normal' relations with the other". It must be asked: "Is normalization the true purpose and result of visiting Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa?"

Not visiting Jerusalem serves those who seek to eradicate the Holy City's Islamic identity and history and those who aim to isolate the Jerusalemites.

Visiting Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa is a religious duty for those who are able to visit it, particularly for Muslim scholars and intellectuals.

Is visiting someone who is jailed normalization with the jailor? Imagine: a band of usurpers comes and throws your mother in jail and visiting her can only be done through them,

the aggressors; does this mean that visiting your mother is normalization with the jailor?

What does it mean to leave the right to be blessed by visiting and defending Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa only to Palestinians and the 1948 Arabs (i.e. those upon whom Israeli citizenship was imposed under occupation)?

It behoves Muslims to consider visiting Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa as good tidings that precede help from God and present victory. God says in the Holy Qur'an:

> *It may be that your Lord will have mercy upon you, but if you revert, We [too] will revert; and We have made Hell a dungeon for the disbelievers. (Al-Isra': 17:8)*

In the Name of God,
the Compassionate, the Merciful
Peace and Prayers be Upon the Seal of the Prophets,
Muhammad and his Kin

Introduction: Why Should Muslims Visit Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa*?

THIS PAPER SHEDS LIGHT on some of the practical, political and religious reasons why all Muslims, and not only Palestinian Muslims, should rally around Al-Haram Al-Sharif. Muslims should visit Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa in order to empower the steadfast and stalwart Jerusalemites who struggle to remain in the Holy City; so that they may know that responsibility for the mosque does not rest only with them, but with the world's 1.7 billion Muslims who can no longer stand to be separated from one of Islam's three holiest sites while they await a political initiative here or an international or Arab or Islamic condemnation there. The halls of the United Nations and the Organization of the Islamic Conference have witnessed countless denunciations and numerous plans for

* Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa, Al-Haram Al-Sharif and Bayt Al-Maqdis are synonyms (although in some instances Bayt Al-Maqdis also means Jerusalem). They refer to the entirety of the holy Islamic site located in the far south-eastern corner of the walled Old City of Jerusalem. This site constitutes the entire esplanade including its walls and its environs. This includes the Dome of the Rock Mosque, the Qibali Mosque, the Marwani Mosque, Abraham's Cave, underneath the Dome of the Rock, the Old Aqsa, the Khanthaniyah School, the Buraq Mosque, the plazas of the esplanade, its gates, hallways, roads, cisterns, aqueducts and aquifers, inner and outer prayer areas and structures both above and below the holy site. The environs of the Mosque include the Magharbeh Gate Pathway and the Buraq Plaza. Above the ground and within the walls of the esplanade Al-Haram Al-Sharif is about 144 dunums (144,000 m^2). The subterranean and aboveground spaces, their perimeters and environs are an indivisible part of Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa which is an Islamic waqf unutterably holy to 1.7 billion Muslims worldwide.

supporting the Palestinians. Media archives are inundated with photographs and articles that reveal the violations in the vicinity of Al-Haram Al-Sharif and its plazas. The drawers of Jewish organizations are filled to the brim with reports that speak of their accomplishments on the ground and their ambitions to establish the planned "Third Temple" in the place of one of Islam's three holiest sites, counting on the occupation's success at isolating the Holy City from its human, spiritual and economic dimensions.

This campaign to visit Jerusalem is a means to achieve the following three goals: 1. Resisting the Judaization of Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa; 2. Encouraging the sons and daughters of the Muslim Ummah to exert more effort to save Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa; 3. Countering the Israeli claim that it allows freedom of worship and access to holy places in Jerusalem to the followers of the three Abrahamic religions.

Following are the most important reasons that should motivate Muslims the world over to visit Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa and to stand by their beleaguered brethren, the Jerusalemites, by saturating Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa's halls and plazas with their presence and revitalizing the markets and shops of Jerusalem with worshipers and pilgrims.

First: Accelerated Violations and Judaization of Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa

1. Tunnelling and excavations: As of the year 2012, there are 20 tunnels that threaten to penetrate the walls of the Al-Haram Al-Sharif. Some have been converted into synagogues with Talmudic names that imply to the visitor that they are part of the so-called Jewish temple. The Israeli Antiquities Authority (IAA) and the settler organizations continue their clandestine campaign to eat away at Al-Haram Al-Sharif via more than 114 excavation sites where the long and interconnected tunnels are being hollowed and constructed under and around Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa. Collectively, these tunnels reach a length of over 3,000 meters. Even worse, since 2009 the Israeli occupation has declared that some of these tunnels and excavations, which have been clandestine since 1967, are now complete. These declarations have been made in the media, in touristic publications and in official reports submitted to scientific congregations and to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre. Furthermore, and even more insidious, is the occupation's semi-official admission that this tunneling has reached the foundations of Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa, particularly in the south-western corner of Al-Haram Al-Sharif. The occupation has made it a point to publicize alleged archaeological findings as relics of the first and second temple periods. This all means that the Islamic archaeological relics around Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa are allowed to fall into decrepitude until Al-Haram Al-Sharif is left to stand alone like some anomalous Muslim museum amidst a forest of archaeological remains that all tell a Jewish narrative.

2. Ariel Sharon's year 2000 strategy to Judaize Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa, violate its sanctity and allocate parts of it for Jewish worship: In spite of Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa Uprising (Intifada) and the Arabs boycotting Israel more intensely than any time

between the period 1993–2000, this strategy has succeeded in preventing Palestinian Muslims from reaching Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa. Sharon's plan also led to over 1,500–2,000 acts of assault and aggression against Al-Haram Al-Sharif up until the time of this writing (2012). This Judaizing strategy has also led over 50 thousand settlers and almost 2 million non-Muslim tourists to enter Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa without permission or coordination with the Muslim Awqaf since the year 2000. The settlers continue to support Mayor of Jerusalem Nir Barkat's ambition to have an annual number of 10 million tourists visiting Jerusalem and listening to Jewish tour guides who refer to Al-Haram Al-Sharif as the "Jewish temple". The Jerusalem Municipality also coordinates with hundreds of Jewish organizations around the world in order to fulfill this goal. Since the year 2000, tens of settler organizations, supported by the occupation's official institutions, have established tens of museums as part of the Judaization campaign that aims to build a Jewish temple in place of Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa.

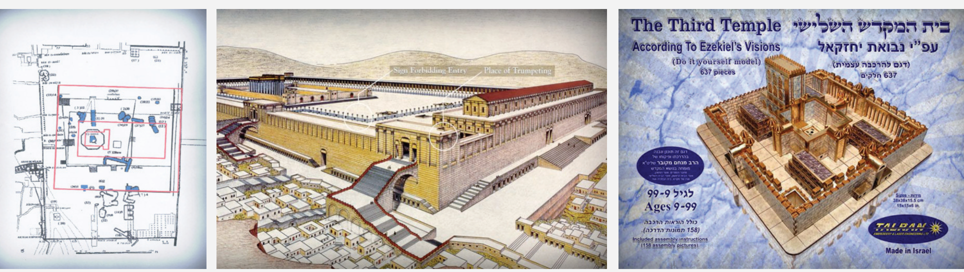


Figure 1: *left*: One of many theories locating of the so-called Jewish temple where the Dome of the Rock stands; *centre*: an envisaged recreation of the so-called Jewish temple; *right*: a projected image of the planned "Third Temple", models of which are sold in touristic centres and shops to gradually create acceptance in people's minds that the "Third Temple" should be built in place of Al-Haram Al-Sharif.

3. Isolating and Judaizing Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa's history and its environs and obliterating the Muslim character of the area: It is becoming increasingly clear that the current year, (2012), is witnessing an escalation in the Israeli occupation's Judaizing activities on the ground. It has shifted from planning mode to execution mode while minimizing loss of time as much as possible. This is due to the occupation's conviction that time is running out under the recent changes in the Arab and Islamic worlds due to the Muslim Arab Spring. During 2011, over 6,000 settlers forced their way into Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa to perform religious rituals. Al-Haram Al-Sharif also witnessed a campaign of heavy Israeli military presence on a daily basis during that year; in addition to unprecedented levels of pressure exerted on Muslims who flock to Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa to worship and pray. The occupation authorities also filled Al-Haram Al-Sharif with surveillance cameras to monitor and intimidate each and every Muslim worshipper who enters Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa, while simultaneously depriving around 4 million Palestinians from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip from reaching Jerusalem and Al-Haram Al-Sharif. It is worth mentioning here that the report of the Palestinian Liberation Organization's Negotiations Affairs Department which estimates that as of 2011, the occupation authorities have pushed out over 14,000 Palestinians from Jerusalem and have razed over 3,300 homes. Moreover, the Separation Wall continues to remove the homes of over 70 thousand Arab inhabitants from the perimeters of the Holy City of Jerusalem.

4. Obstructing the work of the Awqaf and the Hashemite Restoration Projects: The Israeli occupation has exhibited unprecedented interference in the Awqaf Authority's jurisdiction in Jerusalem. It has prevented it from executing the necessary Hashemite restoration and maintenance projects needed in over 11 sites inside Al-Haram Al-Sharif, including obstruct-

ing the necessary restoration work needed in the Marwani Mosque, the eastern and southern walls of the compound and repairing tiles. These obstructions are attempts to subjugate Al-Haram Al-Sharif to the occupation authority's laws (the Israeli Antiquities Authority and the Jerusalem Municipality); as if Al-Haram Al-Sharif were just an ordinary building for which they may one day issue a demolition order under the pretext that it is missing a reconstruction or building permit.

5. Intense settler presence and activity and calls for the division of Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa: In tandem with the obstruction of the Awqaf Administration's work, the activities of Jewish organizations calling for the building of a Jewish temple in place of part, or all, of Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa has seen a significant increase recently. These organizations see the almost daily Jewish presence in Al-Haram Al-Sharif, and the performance of Jewish prayers and rituals in the Al-Haram Al-Sharif as a first step in the execution of the plan to divide Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa between Muslims and Jews; exactly as has been done in Hebron in the Ibrahimi Mosque (referred to by Israelis as the Cave of the Patriarchs). They also consider this an on the ground start to establish a Jewish temple over Al-Haram Al-Sharif. These organizations also gamble on the silence of the Muslim World which has forgotten that the Ibrahimi Mosque was solely a mosque until early 1990 and today has become a synagogue for the most part and no one can stop the settlers or the Israeli army from raising the flag of the occupying state over the mosque.

6. Establishing so-called 'temple' museums and facilities around Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa: The past decade has witnessed the establishment of tens of museums around Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa, referred to as "facilities of the so-called 2nd and 3rd Jewish temples".[1] Museums such as these have been established in



Figure 2: New synagogues above and below the ground: *right*: near Bab Al-Silsilah, the Ohel Yitzhak Synagogue, opened in 2009, has two above ground floors; through it visitors can go into the Western Wall Tunnels where settlers plan to open the largest underground synagogue in the world along the western wall of Al-Haram Al-Sharif; *left*: Umayyad palaces that might be transformed into synagogues along the southern wall of Al-Haram Al-Sharif.

the Umayyad Palaces south of Al-Haram Al-Sharif, beneath the Buraq Plaza, at the Sharaf Neighbourhood, the Western Wall Tunnels, Bab Al-Amoud (Solomon's Cave), Silwan (Ain Silwan), Bab Al-Khalil, Bab Al-Nabi Dawood, the Christian Quarter, Bab Al-Ghawanmeh, Bab Hittah, the Golden Gate and many other locations around Al-Haram Al-Sharif. Moreover, new Jewish settlements have been established in the environs of Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa such as the Har Hatzofim settlement in Ras Al-Amoud and settlements on the Mount of Olives. The Israeli occupation has also Judaized Islamic and Arab sites and relics under the guise of "restoration projects" which have changed inscriptions in the historic Islamic wall of Jerusalem.

7. Beyond the Magharbeh Gate Pathway: the comprehensive plan to remove all Islamic relics from the Buraq Plaza (referred to by Israelis as the Wailing/Western Wall Plaza): Since 2004, and particularly in 2011, the most controversial issue in the

international media regarding Jerusalem has been the plan to finalize the demolition of the Magharbeh Gate Pathway and replace it with a bridge that leads into Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa. For the Israelis, the Magharbeh Gate Pathway is a political and religious tool to keep international observers and the Muslim World busy while the work continues on the tunnels in the vicinity of Al-Haram Al-Sharif. The occupation authorities are rushing to turn these tunnels into Jewish-themed parks that encircle Al-Haram Al-Sharif from all four sides. The year 2012 has witnessed the building of settlements and centres that aim to Judaize Jerusalem. These settlements and centres are in the preliminary, semi-final and final stages and are being built under the guise of "touristic and trade centres" and facilitate access to the Buraq Plaza for Jews and tourists. The Buraq Plaza itself has been undergoing an underground hollowing process in an area that is presumed to exceed 60 × 60 meters. The process has obliterated all traces of Roman and Muslim history without any oversight or documentation.

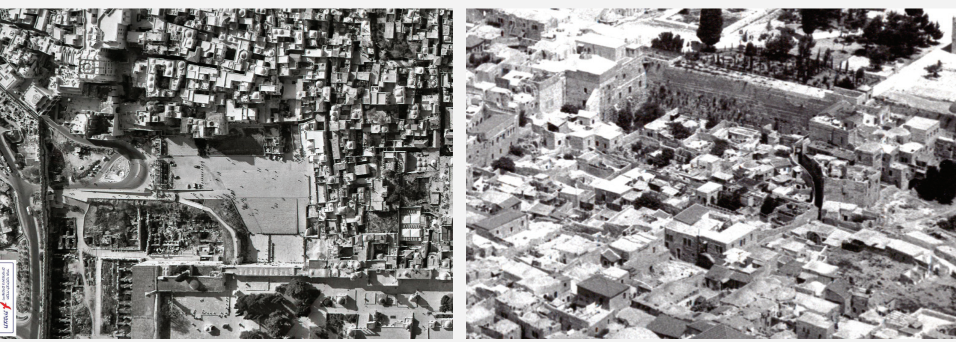


Figure 3: *far right*: The Old City of Jerusalem before the destruction of the Magharbeh Neighbourhood in 1967. After its destruction, the Buraq Plaza's dimensions were expanded from 3 meters wide and 22 meters high, to 70 meters wide and 60 meters high. The 2010 plan to expand the Buraq Plaza aims to remove the remaining relics of the Magharbeh Neighbourhood and to build a transportation station, elevators and museums underneath the Buraq Plaza and at the expense of historic relics, including Muslim relics.

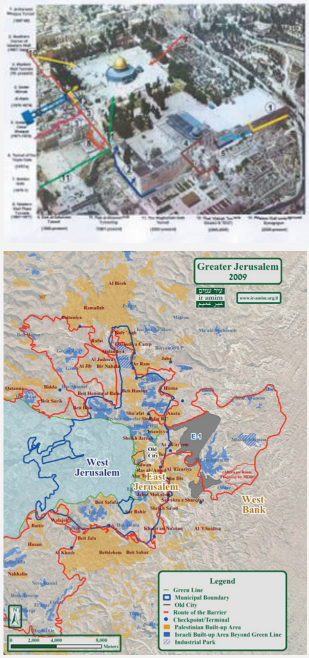


Figure 4: *top:* the tunnels that surround Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa and eat away at its edges. *bottom*: The Separation Wall that isolates Jerusalem.

8. The Separation Wall and preventing Jerusalemites and the 1948 Arabs from reaching Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa: Jerusalemites and the 1948 Arabs expend great effort trying to be human shields that fill the vacuum and defend Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa through various projects that aim to fill it with worshipers and enhance the Muslim Ummah's strong bond with their holy site[2]. Although all these efforts are valuable and support the Hashemite Restoration and patronage of Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa, Jerusalemites, the 1948 Arabs and the Jerusalem Awqaf Administration alone cannot contend with the Judaization campaign and the religious tourism from all over the world that support and finance the building of synagogues and Talmudic schools in Jerusalem.

9. Isolation of Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa aids in establishing the Jewish narrative as truth over the Muslim narrative: Most of the people who have visited Jerusalem since 1967 are non-Muslims who listen only to the Jewish narrative about Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa and Jerusalem. Some observers believe that this isolation of the Holy City and the dissemination of the Jewish narrative about Jerusalem and the history of Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa pose more of a threat to Al-Haram Al-Sharif than demolishing one of its walls or having a room or window or gate confiscated. This is because the narrative says that all of Jerusalem is a Jewish city, and that the entirety of Al-Haram

Al-Sharif is a Jewish temple and is in fact "Solomon's Temple". What is even worse is that some tourist guides and proponents of the Jewish narrative tell tourists and foreign researchers that the Caliph Omar ibn Al-Khattab built Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa in consultation with Jews who lived in Jerusalem, and that the Pact of Omar, which forbids Jews from entering Jerusalem, was actually the work of Sophronius, the Patriarch of Jerusalem and not Omar ibn Al-Khattab. Moreover, they also claim that the architecture and ornamentation of the Noble Dome of the Rock is in fact Jewish. Some Jewish guides and authors do not shy away from rewriting history when they claim that Salaheddine Al-Ayyoubi was failed by the Arabs and Muslims and was championed by the Jews to remove the Crusaders from Jerusalem and allow Jews to re-enter the Holy City.

The assault on the Muslim history of Jerusalem runs so deep that some Jews even claim that some Umayyad and Mamluk Caliphs granted the Jews leave to place oil in the lamps of Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa and to perform religious rituals at Al-Haram Al-Sharif's western and eastern walls. Some Jewish historians claim that the stones of the Old Aqsa Mosque, the Marwani Mosque, the Buraq Mosque and the plazas of Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa are actually the stones of the so-called second temple. Anyone wishing to hear such tales need only visit one of the tens of "educational museums" in the Old City where visitors can play with scale models that allow them to recreate a purely Jewish "Temple Mount" by removing any and all Islamic buildings from the surface of the compound and replacing them with models of the planned third temple.

Some extreme organizations that are dedicated to destroying Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa and replacing it with a Jewish temple also select pictures of Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa from the late Ottoman secular Turanian period that show the compound with weeds growing untended. They claim that Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa was neglected before Jews began to compete with Muslims

over it in the early twenties of the last century. They also push pictures showing children from the Old City playing football in the compound; as if to imply that Arabs do not appreciate the holiness of Al-Haram Al-Sharif. Tour guides inevitably ask tourists: "Do you believe that all 144 dunums of the compound can be a mosque when Jerusalem has never been the capital of a single Muslim state in history?" They also ask: "Have you ever seen Islamic architecture anywhere in the Muslim World where a mosque has been built with huge Roman stones over 10 meters long and two meters high, weighing 500 tons? Islam calls for economy and austerity; what we see here are the stones of elaborate castles or an extravagant temple!" The tour guide then naturally concludes that: "This is incontrovertible evidence that these stones are the stones of the Jewish Temple built by King Herod who had a Jewish mother and a Nabatean father and lived in the age of the Romans!"

Some Jewish writers and historians like Professor Mordechai Kedar continue to falsify Islamic history by saying that Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa that is mentioned in the Holy Qur'an is in Khaybar in the Arab Peninsula and not in Jerusalem. They claim that the proof for this is that Jerusalem is mentioned only once in the Holy Qur'an while it is mentioned over 600 times in the Bible. These historians' impertinence does not even stop at Jesus Christ (PBUH); for it is in the New Testament that Jerusalem is mentioned over 600 times and not the Old Testament (in which it is not mentioned even once). This dialectic is a kind of trickery that is used against Christians to whom the Holy Bible is a single unit made up of both the Old and New Testaments. It is worth mentioning here that Jews do not believe in the Bible or that Jesus Christ (PBUH), whom they crucified, was a Prophet. Furthermore, these historians completely ignore the fact that an entire chapter (*surah*) of the Holy Qur'an was revealed about Jerusalem and its environs which God Himself blessed.

The Israeli process of monopolizing the narrative about Jerusalem to the world is so pervasive that some Muslims in Europe and America have become convinced of it. They have fallen for the campaign that says that the rebuilding of the so-called Jewish temple in place of Al-Haram Al-Sharif will be followed by the return of the Messiah which will bring on the Rapture.

Visiting Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa: Between Religious Duty and Normalization

1. Visiting Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa as described in the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah: God says in the Holy Qur'an:

Glory be to Him Who carried His servant by night from the Sacred Mosque to Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa; the environs of which We have blessed, that We might show him some of Our signs. Indeed He is the Hearing, the Seeing. (Al-Isra': 17:1)

And God says:

In houses [whose status] God has allowed to be raised, and wherein His Name is remembered, therein [they] make glorifications to Him in the mornings and the evenings (Al-Nur, 24:36)

In the verse from Al-Nur, "houses" means mosques, including Al-Haram Al-Sharif[3]. Al-Hasan bin Abu Al-Hasan said: "What is meant here is the Mosque of Jerusalem (Bayt Al-Maqdis) and God Almighty called it "buyutan" (houses)"[4]. Scholars have studied many Qur'anic verses that do not mention Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa by name but the Tafsirs of the Holy Qur'an and books on the fada'il of the Holy Qur'an mention that the mosque meant in many of these verses is Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa[5]. In a Hadith narrated upon the authority of Anas ibn Malik (May Allah be pleased with him), the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said:

I mounted the Buraq that was sent to me until I arrived at Bayt Al-Maqdis. I tied the Buraq to the ring that the Prophets use and I entered the Mosque. I prayed two

rak'ah's and then I ascended to the heavens above. (Narrated by Muslim).

In a Hadith narrated upon the authority of Sufyan, on the authority of Al-Zuhri, on the authority of Sai'd, on the authority of Abu Huraira (may Allah be pleased with them all), the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: "*Do not set out for pilgrimage except to three mosques; Al-Masjid Al-Haram [in Mecca], Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa [in Jerusalem] and my Mosque [in Madinah]*". (Narrated by Bukhari, 1996 and Muslim, 1397).

In a Hadith narrated upon the authority of Dhumrah bin Rabee'ah, on the authority of Uthman bin Ataa', on the authority of Abu Umran, on the authority of Thi Al-Asabe' Al-Tamimi Al-Ansari (may Allah be pleased with them all) who asked the Prophet (PBUH): "'If we are tested to live after your death, where do you command us to situate?' The Prophet (PBUH) said: "*Bayt Al-Maqdis, perhaps you will have offspring who will commit themselves to that mosque and visit it*"". (Narrated by Imam Ahmad and Al-Tabarani)[6].

In a Hadith narrated upon the authority of Abu Al-Dardaa', the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

> *A prayer in Al-Masjid Al-Haram [in Mecca] is worth 1000 prayers elsewhere, and a prayer in my Mosque [in Madinah] is worth 1,000 prayers elsewhere, and a prayer in Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa [in Jerusalem] is worth 500[7] prayers elsewhere* (it is related in some Hadiths as 1,000[8] prayers).

It is narrated upon the authority of Maymuna bint Sa'd – also known as Maymuna bint Sa'eed – that she asked the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH): "O Messenger of God, inform us about Bayt Al-Maqdis (Jerusalem)". The Prophet (PBUH) said: "*It is the land of gathering, you must visit it for prayer; a prayer in it is worth a thousand prayers elsewhere*". She further

asked: "And if one cannot visit it?" The Prophet said: "*Then gift it with oil to light its lamps; it will be as if you have visited it. Indeed if one cannot visit it, one must send oil to light it*". In another narration of the Prophet's (PBUH) Hadith narrated on the authority of Maymuna, the Prophet said: "*You must visit it for prayer*". She further asked: "What if the Romans are in it?" The Prophet (PBUH) said: "*If you cannot, then gift it with oil to light its lamps*". [9] In another narration of the Hadith, Maymonah said that the Prophet PBUH) said: "'*Visit the Mosque and pray in it*'. She then asked: "O Messenger of Allah, how do we do so if the Romans are there?" He replied: '*If you cannot do so, then send oil to light its lamps*".[10]

It is narrated upon the authority of Anas bin Malek that the Prophet (PBUH) said:

> *He who visits Bayt Al-Maqdis for the sake of Allah will be granted by the Almighty the reward of a thousand martyrs. And he who visits a scholar has the same reward as visiting Bayt Al-Maqdis. And he who visits Bayt Al-Maqdis for the sake of Allah will be kept from hellfire by the Almighty.*[11]

Abu Dhar narrated that: "We were discussing before the Messenger of God which is better, the Mosque of the Prophet or Bayt Al-Maqdis? The Messenger of God (PBUH) then said:

> *One prayer in my mosque is better than four prayers; it is a good place for prayer. Soon there will be a time when if a man has a tiny spot of land from which he can see Bayt Al-Maqdis, that will be better for him than the whole world.*[12]

Ibn Umamah Al-Bahili narrated that the Prophet (PBUH) said:

> "*A group of my Ummah will remain righteous, invincible to their enemies, unharmed by those who are against them until doomsday*". The Prophet (PBUH) was then asked: "And where are those people?" The Prophet (PBUH) said: "*In Bayt Al-Maqdis and its environs*"[13].

The Prophet (PBUH) also said: "*Whosoever wants to behold a piece of Paradise, let him behold Jerusalem (Bayt Al-Maqdis)*".

It is narrated on the authority of Um Salamah, wife of the Prophet (PBUH) that she heard the Prophet say:

> *Whosoever performs Ihram for Hajj or Umrah from Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa [in Jerusalem] and then proceeds to Al-Masjid Al-Haram [in Mecca], their past and future sins will be forgiven, or they will be entered into Paradise*.[14]

Abdullah ibn Omar said: "Bayt Al-Maqdis was built and inhabited by prophets; each and every inch has been prostrated upon by a prophet or an angel".

2. Al-Israa' wal Mi'raaj (The Prophet Muhammad's Nocturnal Journey): We mentioned the Prophet Muhammad's miraculous night journey as it is explained in the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah. It was during this event that the Prophet (PBUH) prayed with all the prophets as Imam and this was a symbol of his receiving prophethood. The Prophet Muhammad then ascended to the heavens and reached Sidrat Al-Muntaha (the lote-tree of the utmost boundary); a place not even the Archangel Gabriel was able to reach.

3. The Treaty (or Sulh) of Hudaybiyah in order to reach Mecca: Ibn Ishaq narrates in his biography of the Prophet (PBUH):

> ... The Prophet (PBUH) set out with those who were with

> him of the emigrants (*muhajirun*), the helpers (*ansar*) and those Arabs who followed him. He performed *Ihram* for Umrah so that people would be assured that he had not come for war; only to visit the Inviolable House and to glorify its sanctity[15].

Hence we see in both the Holy Qur'an, and the Prophet Muhammad's Sunnah that visiting Mecca has no exceptions or caveats. We see this in the instance of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) visiting Mecca (under the Treaty of Hudaybiyah) when it was under the idolaters and when the Ka'bah was surrounded by idols. Indeed the Prophet (PBUH) circumambulated the Ka'bah and went back and forth between Al-Safa and Al-Marwah out of love and longing for the Inviolable House in Mecca and in the hope that it would one day be free.

As for Omar ibn Al-Khattab's position in regards to the Treaty of Hudaybiyah, ibn Hisham relates the following account from Ibn Ishaq:

> When all was ready and nothing but the writing remained, Omar ibn Al-Khattab asked Abu Bakr: "O Abu Bakr, is he not the Prophet of God?" Abu Bakr replied: "Indeed he is." Omar asked: "Are we not Muslims?" Abu Bakr replied: "Indeed we are". Omar asked: "Are they not idolators?" Abut Bakr replied: "Indeed they are". Omar asked: "Then why should we surrender in a matter relating to our faith and bear the brunt of humiliation?" Abu Bakr said: "Omar! Do not overstep! I bear witness that he is the Prophet of God!" Omar said: "And I bear witness that he is the Prophet of God." Then the Prophet (PBUH) came and Omar asked him: "Are you not the Prophet of God?" The Prophet replied: "*Indeed I am*." Omar asked: "Are we not Muslims?" The Prophet replied: "*Indeed we are*." Omar asked: "Are they not idolators?" The Prophet re-

plied: "*Indeed they are.*" Omar asked: "Then why should we surrender in a matter relating to our faith and bear the brunt of humiliation?" The Prophet replied: "*I am Allah's slave and messenger and I will not disobey Him and He will not lead me astray.*" It was later related that Omar said: "From that day till this I offer charity and I fast and pray to rid myself of the blame I acquired speaking thus."

4. The Conquest of Jerusalem: The Caliph Omar entered Jerusalem while it was under the Byzantines and none of the Companions objected to this.

5. Visiting Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa under Crusader rule: In Volume III of *A History of the Crusades*, Steven Runciman relates that in 1229:

> It was with relief that Frederick turned aside from his work to visit the Moslem shrines. The Sultan had tactfully ordered the Muezzin at al-Aqsa not to make the call to prayer while the Christian sovereign was in the city. But Frederick protested. The Moslems must not change their customs because of him. Besides, he said he had come to Jerusalem in order to hear the Muezzins' call through the night. As he entered the holy area of the Haram as-Sharif he noticed a Christian cleric following behind. He at once himself rudely ejected him, and gave orders that any Christian priest that crossed its threshold without permission from the Moslems should be put to death.

Thus, it is clear that visiting Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa never witnessed a period of interruption even while it was under the rule of the Crusaders[16]. No one described these visits as normalization or surrender to Crusader rule. It is for certain that some visits to Jerusalem by Muslim scholars took place

while the Holy City was under foreign occupation in 492 Hijri. These scholars contributed in defending the Holy City. History relates that Imam Muhammad bin Al-Walid Al-Tartoushi Al-Andalusi visited Jerusalem and resided in it in the year 496[17] Hijri, after it was conquered by the Crusaders. The Jurist Abu Bakr bin Al-Arabi visited him there and Al-Tartoushi gave him a letter to the Sultan of the Stalwarts (*murabitun*), Yousef bin Tashfeen, telling him that the Muslim scholars and Jurists of Jerusalem followed his efforts with great interest[18]. Moreover, Al-Hafiz Abdul-Karim bin Muhammad Abu Sa'd Al-Sam'ani (d. 462 Hijri) was able to visit Jerusalem and reside in it while the Holy City was under foreign occupation; indeed he wrote his book *Fartul Gharam ila Sakini al-Sham* in Jerusalem[19]. Further, it is interesting to note that Imam Muhammad ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 Hijri), who was quite strict in many matters, issued an edict that: "It is always legitimate from the point of view of Shari'ah to visit Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa and Jerusalem". If Ibn Taymiyyah had an exception to the visiting of Jerusalem while under occupation, he would have noted it; particularly since he witnessed, and opposed, the Holy City's falling under foreign and Mogul occupation. Ibn Taymiyyah's edict was recorded in a letter entitled: "A Rule in Visiting Bayt Al-Maqdis (Jerusalem)"[20].

Third: Opinions of Contemporary Muslim Scholars and Officials Regarding Visiting Jerusalem While it is Under Occupation

1. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas: On 28th February, 2012, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas called upon all Muslims to flock to Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa and support it and revitalize it by filling it with worshipers and pilgrims.

2. Palestinian Minister of Awqaf Mahmoud Al-Habash: The Minister has stated that visiting Jerusalem is a religious duty and a political necessity for both Muslims and Christians. He further stated that visiting the Holy City while it is under occupation is in the same vein as the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) visiting Al-Masjid Al-Haram after the Treaty of Hudaybiyah while it was under the rule of the idolators.

3. Head of the Hashemite Restoration Committee Engineer Ra'ef Najem: The Head of the Hashemite Restoration Committee said that everyone who enters Jerusalem will need an Israeli visa; but those who enter Jerusalem intend to offer material and moral support to the Arab Jerusalemites through trade and paying for lodging etc., not to mention praying at Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa and perhaps offering assistance to the impoverished families in the Holy City. Engineer Najem reiterated that deeds are judged by intention and cited the Hadith: "*Actions are defined by their intentions*" (Sahih Bukhari).

4. Head of the Jerusalem File in the P.L.O. Ahmad Qurei': Qurei' said:

> Our brethren in Jerusalem are happy that the Mufti of Egypt visited Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa. I say to everyone who

> sees the visit under Israeli occupation as normalization that Jerusalem will not be liberated by boycotting it and its chains will not be broken by turning our backs on it.

In a statement to the Egyptian Ahram newspaper Qurei' added that simplifying the issue of Jerusalem to a question of whether or not it should be visited, or whether or not one's passport should be stamped with an Israeli visa or fretting that visiting Jerusalem is an act of normalization are all matters that do not serve the greater good of the Holy City.

5. Head of the International Centre for Jerusalem Dr. Hasan Khater: Dr. Khater said that the fatwa (edict) prohibiting visiting Jerusalem has served the occupation and facilitated many of its projects and plans and has indeed harmed Jerusalem greatly.

6. Statement issued by 16 of the Balkans' scholars on visiting the Holy City of Jerusalem:

> The undersigned scholars and muftis see no reason why such visits should not take place. Indeed they see that such visits cause benefit to the Muslim Ummah in terms of rallying around Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa and supporting the Palestinian cause and keeping it alive in the hearts and minds of the youth of the Ummah; particularly in the face of accelerated Zionist efforts to obliterate the Islamic identity of Jerusalem and Judaize the Holy City. The undersigned also approve and celebrate the establishment of the Integral Chair for the Study of Imam Al-Ghazali's Work which was established in Jerusalem at Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa under the patronage of His Majesty King Abdullah II ibn Al-Hussein. This waqf will lend Islamic scholarly and spiritual support to the steadfast protectors of Jerusalem.
> —Issued in Sarajevo on the 2nd of April, 2012.

7. Al-Habib Ali Al-Jifri's statement regarding his visit to Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa:

In accordance with the Prophet Muhammad's Hadith: "*Do not set out for pilgrimage except to three mosques; Al-Masjid Al-Haram [in Mecca], Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa [in Jerusalem] and my Mosque [in Madinah]*", and due to longing for the first Qiblah (direction of prayer) and the place where the Prophet (PBUH) experienced his miraculous Isra', and in response to the Mufti of Jerusalem and Palestine Sheikh Muhammad Hussein's invitation to all Muslims to visit Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa and rally around it and protect its cause and support the steadfast Jerusalemites who stand in the face of Zionist violations and plans to Judaize Jerusalem and obliterate its Islamic and Arab identity, I have consulted with distinguished scholars of the Ummah and asked the Almighty for guidance whether or not to set out for pilgrimage to Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa. My breast was expanded at the prospect and the pilgrimage was facilitated on Wednesday, the 4th of April, 2012. I ask the Almighty for a speedy liberation of Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa, our beleaguered holy sites and the land of beloved Palestine; and I ask the Almighty to awaken our Ummah from its slumber and to ease the burdens of all Muslims ....

8. Mufti of Syria Sheikh Muhammad Sa'eed Ramadan Al-Buti (in a Friday sermon on 20th April, 2012):

Muslims visited Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa while it was under the rule of the Crusaders and they never considered their pilgrimage to be recognition of the Crusaders or their assumed rights. Indeed those Muslims saw their visits to Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa as a challenge to the Crusaders' pres-

ence and a continuation and a renewal of their covenant with the Almighty to repel that aggression ... It is by God's Grace that I searched and found no Imam in history and no Companion of the Prophet (PBUH) who severed ties or stopped visiting Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa while Jerusalem was under the Romans.

9. Egyptian Minister of Awqaf Dr. Mahmoud Hamdi Zaqzouq (Asharq Alawsat Newspaper, 8th August, 2010):

Jerusalem is primarily an Islamic issue and concerns 1.5 billion Muslims the world over. We have sublimated it and dealt with it incorrectly as a Palestinian issue. The invitation to visit Jerusalem stems from concern to emphasize the rights of Muslims in Jerusalem and the necessity of opposing the Judaization of Jerusalem. It is not, as some have suggested, free normalization.

10. The late Sheikh of the Azhar His Eminence Sheikh Muhammad Sa'eed Al-Tantawi (Asharq Alawsat Newspaper, 17th January, 2001):

Our creed demands that we maintain contact and communion with our brethren the Arabs of Palestine and Jerusalem and to nourish ourselves spiritually through connection to Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa and support of the steadfast Jerusalemites. We must also maintain our rights in these holy sites and not leave the matter only to the steadfast Palestinians.

Fourth: Visiting Jerusalem: Between Causing Benefit and Warding off Harm

Warding off harm: Those who forbid visiting Jerusalem base it on the jurisprudential principle that "warding off harm takes precedence over causing benefit". They claim that the harm in this instance is that visiting Jerusalem is normalization with the occupation authority. Normalization is a political term that means "to establish 'normal' relations with the occupier". It must be asked: "Is normalization the true purpose and result of visiting Jerusalem?" Thus, any such statements forbidding the visiting of Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa are political and should not be given a religious dimension that does nothing but harm Muslims; indeed these statements cause harm. The call not to visit Jerusalem serves those who seek to strip the Holy City of its Islamic history and who wish to isolate the Jerusalemites from their Arab and Islamic identity; it is a free service to Judaization plans and false narratives about Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa never being the central issue for Muslims after God changed the Qiblah (direction of prayer) from Jerusalem to Mecca.

Causing benefit: Visiting Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa is first: a religious duty; second: a way of cementing our connection to our holy sites and third: a way of keeping us aware of the plots to destroy and remove our holy sites from existence. Visiting Jerusalem is also a way of supporting the steadfast Jerusalemites as they withstand the harm they face at the hands of the occupation; and a way for them to know that they are not alone in the struggle to maintain the Holy City's authentic identity.

Visiting Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa is a duty for anyone who is able: Visiting the Holy City is a religious duty for anyone who is able, particularly Muslim scholars and intellectuals. This is to ensure that there will never be a gap between them and

the Holy City and its inhabitants that allows plots to Judaize Jerusalem to come to fruition. Communing with the steadfast scholars in Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa helps support them and alleviate the significant challenges and difficulties that they face.

Is visiting someone who is jailed normalization with the jailor? Imagine: a band of usurpers comes and throws your mother in jail and dictates that visiting her can only be done through them, the aggressors; does this mean that visiting your mother and offering her food, water and moral support is normalization with the jailor? Should you deprive her of your visit or yourself from the blessing you gain by visiting her? Where is the benefit and where is the harm?

What does it mean to leave the right to reconstruct, maintain and defend Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa to Israeli identification card holders? Why do the fatwas issued by Sheikh Al-Qaradawi and other Muslim scholars allow only Jerusalemites and the 1948 Arabs (i.e. those upon whom Israeli citizenship was imposed under occupation) to visit the Holy City and Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa? What about the world's 1.7 billion Muslims who all have a connection to Jerusalem and Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa?

Let us imagine that out every 1,000 Muslims, 1 Muslim joins Sheikh Ra'ed Salah's project to perform pilgrimage to Jerusalem and Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa. This project transports Arabs from Northern Palestine to Jerusalem and Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa daily and opens up to them the markets, alleys and hotels of Jerusalem. What is important is that where it is possible, they do not deal with the occupation authority; rather, trade and business dealings are done with Palestinians in accordance with what the Almighty says in the Holy Qur'an:

> *So keep your duty to Allah as best ye can, and listen, and obey, and spend; that is better for your souls. And*

whoso is saved from his own greed, such are the successful. (Al-Taghabun, 64:16)

And in accordance with the Prophet Muhammad's Hadith: "*Actions are defined by their intentions*." (Narrated by Bukhari).

Indeed we must look upon these visits as good portents and tidings that precede help from God and present victory. God says in the Holy Qur'an:

It may be that your Lord will have mercy upon you, but if you revert, We [too] will revert; and We have made Hell a dungeon for the disbelievers (Al-Isra': 17:8)

Endnotes

1 It is possible to visit tens of museums and synagogues that depict Al-Haram Al-Sharif as an Islamic relic that must be removed and replaced by a Jewish temple. Researchers can refer to the website of the Temple Institute (www.templeinstitute.org) or the Herodian Quarter Museum or indeed any site that is dedicated to the study of reconstructing the Jewish temple such as: www.templemount.org (see www.templemount.org/tuviatemple.pdf).

2 These projects include the Bayareq Project, which transports worshipers to and from Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa; the Project to Revitalize the Centres of Learning in Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa; the Project to Feed the Fasting in Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa; the campaign to close the mosques in Jerusalem on Friday except for Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa and other projects that aim to come to the aid of one of Islam's three holiest sites.

3 Al-Tha'labi: Al-Kashf wal Bayan, 7:107; Al-Baghwi: Ma'alimul Tanzeel, 6:50; Al-Tubrusi, Majma'ul Bayan fi Tafsir Al-Qur'an, 7:201; ibn al-Jawzi: Zadul Maseer fi 'Ilm Al-Tafsir, 3:298; Al-Khazen: Lubab Al-Ta'weel, 3:298; Al-Suyuti: Tafsir Al-Dur Al-Manthur fil Tafsir bil-Ma'thur, 5:91; ibn Tamim Al-Maqdisi: Mutheer Al-Gharam, 75.

4 Ibn Atiyyah: Al-Muharrer Al-Wajeez fi Tafsir Al-Kitab Al-'Azeez, 10:514.

5 See: ibn Tamim Al-Maqdisi: *Mutheer Al-Gharam*, p. 65-81.

6 Sahih Muslim, *Kitab Al-Hajj*: *bab la tushaddul rihal illa ila thalathat masajid*, no. 511; Sunan Al-Nisa'i, *Kitab Al-Ma-*

sajid: *bab ma tushaddul rihal ilayhi min masajid*, 2:37; Sunan ibn Majah, *Kitab Iqamatul Salat*: *bab ma jaa' fil salat fi Masjid Bayt Al-Maqdis*, Hadith no. 1409, 1410; Al-Bayhaqi, *Majma' Al-Zawa'id*, 4:6-7; Al-Fazari, *Ba'ith Al-Nufoos ila Ziyarat Al-Quds Al-Mahroos* (manuscript in Al-Khalidiyah Library), 6; ibn Tamim Al-Maqdisi, *Mutheer Al-Gharam*, 207; Al-Minhaji, *It'haf Al-Akhsa bi Fada'il Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa*, 1:96.

7 Al-Bayhaqi: *Majma' Al-Zawa'id*, 4:10; Al-Fazari, *Ba'ith Al-Nufoos ila Ziyarat Al-Quds Al-Mahroos* (manuscript in Al-Khalidiyah Library), 14; ibn Tamim Al-Maqdisi, *Mutheer Al-Gharam*, 201.

8 Ibn Tamim Al-Maqdisi, *Mutheer Al-Gharam*, 202.

9 *Sunan ibn Majah*, *Kitab Iqamat al-Salat, bab ma jaa' fil salat fi masjid bayt al-Maqdis*, Hadith no. 1407, Al-Bayhaqi: *Majma' Al-Zawa'id*, 4:9, Al-Farazi: *Ba'ith Al-Nufoos ila Ziyarat Al-Quds Al-Mahroos* (manuscript in Al-Khalidiyah Library) 7, 8, ibn Tamim Al-Maqdisi, *Mutheer Al-Gharam*, 63, 192, 229.

10 Al-Minhaji, *It'haf Al-Akhsa bi Fada'il Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa*, 1:153.

11 Al-Fazari, *Ba'ith Al-Nufoos ila Ziyarat Al-Quds Al-Mahroos* (manuscript in Al-Khalidiyah Library), 8, ibn Tamim Al-Maqdisi, *Mutheer Al-Gharam*, 198, Al-Minhaji, *It'haf Al-Akhsa bi Fada'il Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa*, 1:138.

12 Al-Haythami, *Majma' al-Zaqa'id*, 4:10, Ibn Tamim Al-Maqdisi, *Mutheer Al-Gharam*, 223 -224, Al-Minhaji, *It'haf Al-Akhsa bi Fada'il Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa*, 1:141.

13 Ibn Tamim Al-Maqdisi, *Mutheer Al-Gharam*, 102.

14 Ibn Tamim Al-Maqdisi, *Mutheer Al-Gharam*, 211.

15 Ibn Hisham, The Seerah of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

16 Runciman, Steven, *A History of the Crusades, Vol. III, The Kingdom of Acre and the Later Crusades*, Cambridge University Press, 1951, p. 189.

17 Abu Bakr bin Al-Arabi: *Shawahid al-Jullah*, 331; Ibn Tamim Al-Maqdisi, *Mutheer Al-Gharam*, 363.

18 Abu Bakr bin Al-Arabi: *Shawahid al-Jullah*, 332.

19 *Al-Ansab*, 1:16, 26 (*Muqadimat al-Muhaqaq*), Ibn Asakir: *Tareekh Madinat Dimashq*, 36:448, Ibn Tamim Al-Maqdisi: *Muteer Al-Gharam*, 366, Lu'ay Al-Bawa'ah, *Dawr al-Ulama' al-Muslimin fi Muqawamat al-Ghazw al-Firanji (al-Salibi)*, p. 383.

20 "A Muslim Iconoclast (Ibn Taymiyyeh): on the Merits of Jerusalem and Palestine", by Charles D. Matthews, Journal of the American Oriental Society, Vol. 56 (1935), p. 1-21.



